

## **Appendix A**

### **Walsall Council Community Sponsorship Internal Approval Process February 2021**

#### **Introduction**

The Home Secretary launched the Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme (VPRS) in January 2014, and invited all local authorities in the UK to participate. A limited number of authorities joined and the first refugees arrived in the UK in March 2014. In response to the conflict in Syria in September 2015, a significant extension of the VPRS was announced by the government to resettle up to 20,000 individual refugees over five years and requested local authorities to assist. The Home Office introduced a voluntary Community Sponsorship Scheme in 2016 whereby local community groups can take responsibility to welcome and support refugees from Syria and the surrounding region directly into their communities. This complements resettlement work undertaken by local authorities as part of the VPRS and responds to communities wanting to play a greater role in refugee resettlement.

Nationally VPRS is targeted to be completed by the end of February 2021 and be placed by a new amalgamated scheme. Funding for resettlement beyond VPRS will remain unchanged. The Home Office will communicate and consult with their partners in advance if changes to funding are anticipated. The Home Office is also aiming to increase the amount of Community Sponsorship as part of the overall resettlement package (but numbers will continue to be counted outside of the resettlement figures).

In order to help deliver the community sponsorship scheme in Walsall, the council is required to play an active role in the selection process supporting the Home Office. The council will need to consider providing consent to the community sponsor at two stages of their application. The first stage is to consent so that the group can operate as a community sponsor in the area. The second stage is to agree that the group can accept the refugee family/household; once the Home Office has formally approved the community sponsor group.

Reset is the UK's Community Sponsorship training, support and advice provider, funded by the Home Office. As well as working with Community Sponsorship volunteers, Reset also provide services to Local Authorities and Lead Sponsors who work alongside volunteers to facilitate Community Sponsorship. Reset will ensure the Home Office required training is in place with the community sponsor and act as appoint of contact for the council for any issues relating to the Community Sponsorship scheme.

Community sponsors must be local registered charities or community interest companies and are responsible for all elements of resettling the family. This includes providing accommodation, meeting the family at the airport, providing a welcome and cultural orientation, providing English language tuition, supporting access to medical and social services and support towards gaining employment. Community sponsors must also provide at least £9,000 in funding to meet some of the financial needs of the resettled family and a detailed and credible plan to illustrate how they will deliver effective resettlement support to a resettled family. Community sponsors will need to be approved as a sponsor through a Home Office led application process. Community sponsors also require written consent of the council in the area where the resettled family will live.

Successful integration of refugee families is a key concept; we encourage the sponsor to integrate the refugees in the voluntary and community activities available to them on a local

and borough wide level. This will include providing opportunities for mixing with other communities across Walsall.

### **Property Requirements**

The property will need to be in a suitable area in order to ensure integration and help to build strong and prosperous communities and can include a private or social let. The property will be inspected by the council's Housing Standards Team and any repair work will be required to be completed and copies of relevant certificates including for gas, electricity and Energy Performance Certificate which must be provided in advance of the family moving in. All units of accommodation will need to conform to relevant housing, building control, planning and other relevant standards including the Housing Health and Safety Rating System and properties are free from any Category 1 and Category 2 hazards. Additionally no properties should be band E to G inclusive as rated by Energy Performance Standards.

If any property is to be occupied by unrelated persons who share a toilet, kitchen or bathroom and thereby forming a House in Multiple Occupation (HMO) then relevant fire safety measures will also need to be put in place before it becomes occupied. The Housing Standards Team can provide advice on this.

The council will support those providers who are able to ensure properties are affordable where possible at or below Local Housing Allowance rates. For properties where this is not possible the top up must be affordable to the family unit to ensure sustainability of tenancy.

### **Safeguarding**

The council will require the Community Sponsor to provide a copy of their Safeguarding policy which the council's local safeguarding board will assess and provide any local arrangement to the community sponsor. The Home Office is responsible for ensuring relevant checks and safeguarding issues are followed through.

The council will also assess and provide support in respect to any special educational needs, and any adult and children social care needs. The council will draw down any additional funds to support health or special educational needs. There will also be a legal duty to provide school places to children of compulsory school age.

### **Funding**

The council will claim a number of tariffs, which will be used to help support the resettlement of the household in line with the [Home Office Funding Instructions 2020/2021](#). The tariffs can only be claimed on the families/clients entry to the UK and are one-off, year 1 tariffs (claimed through the Movelt portal):

Education –for qualifying children (£4500 per child 5-18 year olds and £2,250 per child for children aged 3-4 funding (under 3 no payment). The council has the discretion to either to transfer this to a set school or to the central education teams (at the council's discretion). The tariff can be used for related expenditure such as (free school meals, uniforms or extra classroom support)

Adult Education – for each qualifying adult £850 is drawn down for English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) – this can be sent to the provider of ESOL at the council's discretion. The Community Sponsor will be required to ensure liaison with the council's ESOL coordinator in ensuring the type of provision meets the needs of the customer.

Walsall's Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) - to support healthcare provision the tariff is set at £2600 per person for the General Practitioner (GP) in the area and will be transferred to the GP by the council.

The council can claim Exceptional Cost payments to cover social care provision for refugees. There is no minimum or maximum amount that can be claimed but Exceptional Costs cannot be claimed for support provided to a Refugee that would normally be funded through health or education funding or through welfare payments. The council will need to ensure any incurring Exceptional Costs should be sought with written agreement from the Home Office or risk having the claim rejected.

### **Break Down of placements or Move On**

The community Sponsor is responsible for notifying the council of any breakdown in support and help transition the client(s) to local authority support in the first year. The Community Sponsor will notify the council of any families/Clients who have additional support needs (health or education) which may be beyond the first year of support. The council may be required to draw on any additional funds from the Home Office to cover this arrangement and also for years 2-5. After an initial 6 months the community sponsor is required to address a housing move-on plan for the client.

In the case of not being able to adequately provide move on accommodation after the initial year the Community Sponsor will ensure the council is notified through the councils [duty to refer](#) process of any families at risk of becoming homeless. It is essential the council be notified in advance (12 weeks prior) to the end of the tenancy if there is a housing need or requirement.

### **Approval of Community Sponsors and families**

The councils Designated Officer will ensure a visit is conducted with the perspective Community Sponsor and will ensure regular liaison with the Home Office contractor and lead officer at Reset. Although the application is vetted and verified by the Home Office the councils Designated Officer will work with the Community Sponsorship group where required in providing contacts to any services in the council and will also act as the single point of contact in the process for all external agencies. The council has the right to decline support of a community sponsor application based on the following reasons:

- insufficient capacity to provide certain crucial local services in the proposed housing area (e.g. lack of school places)
- concerns about community tensions in the proposed housing area
- where the council have a strong reason to believe that the community sponsor is not suitable to undertake the resettlement of vulnerable adults and children;
- or another appropriate reason

The Community Sponsor does have the right of appeal which should be made in writing no later than 7 days of receiving a negative decision.

The council will assess the suitability of an incoming family and feedback and concerns or approval to the Home Office. The council has the right to decline a potential family unit due to reasons including unsuitability of the proposed property, not being confident the community sponsor will be able to meet additional needs or support needs of the family unit or any other appropriate reason.

## **Quality Monitoring and Review**

The councils Designated Officer will actively engage with the Community sponsor, Home Office and Resettlement to support the application process wherever possible. The council will conduct regular visits to the Community Sponsor and speak to the incoming household where possible. The councils Designated Officer will review support plans and also assess move on accommodation options to ensure the household is able to sustain tenancy and achieve independence. The council will monitor quarterly:

- the number of requests received from Community Sponsors
- the number of successful/unsuccessful Community Sponsorship applicants
- Protected characteristics of incoming households as defined by the Equality Act 2010
- Details of the community sponsor in terms of type of organisation and community they service
- Details of the community Sponsor property being used

The Designated Officer will conduct an annual internal evaluation on the process and recommend any changes. The Designated Officer will also make changes to the policy reflecting any national changes in VPRS or Home Office directives.

### Summary - Draft council approval process

Stage 1: consent from the local authority on application in principle;

Walsall council receives details of Community Sponsorship application (application detailing name, location, stage of Home Office application and details of property)

- Details are sent to internal teams: Money Home Job, Housing Standards, Community Cohesion Team, Community safety, Public Health Commissioning, Education and any other relevant service (14 days) and Designated Officer meets organisations and validates application
- Housing Standards conduct property inspection if a property is available

Collated council/partner response sent by council Designated Officer to Delegated Authority named officer (response up to 5 days in case of any issues )

Community Sponsor is approved – Letter of support in principle sent out to organisation – see draft letter

Community Sponsor is declined due to specific reason, see draft letter

### Stage 2: Resettlement household is allocated through Movelt

Local authority are notified of a household

Household is agreed as suitable (with Delegated Authority Officer) and property is suitable

Local authority decline the incoming household due to validated reason

Household is matched on Movelt system and details pass onto Community Sponsor group

Household tariffs are claimed by Local authority via Movelt and distributed as per funding instructions

## Draft Approval/Decline Letter

Date

Walsall council

Dear XX,

### Re: Letter of support/decline for Community Sponsorship Application

Thank you for sharing your Community Sponsorship application with Walsall Council. Following our conversation and your subsequent application, *I can confirm that Walsall Council is happy to support your application to the Home Office and will commit to conducting a property inspection, once a property has been secured and will also support your organisation throughout the process. Or we regret to inform you we are not in the position to support your application due to:*

- insufficient capacity to provide certain crucial local services in the proposed housing area (e.g. lack of school places)
- concerns about community tensions in the proposed housing area
- where the council have a strong reason to believe that the community sponsor is not suitable to undertake the resettlement of vulnerable adults and children;
- or another appropriate reason

I would just like to take this opportunity to emphasise the fundamental importance of learning English ensuring exposure to English language learning is accessible and prioritised. It would be great if XXXX could commit to ensuring that those that are involved in supporting the family, speak to the family in English rather than in their native language whenever possible. XX will be able to provide guidance regarding ESOL support and throughout the process once the family arrive, ensuring connections are made to the other Syrian families and services provided through the scheme. If you have any queries, please do not hesitate to get in touch with XXX.

If you are unhappy with this decision please contact us at XX within 7 days of receiving this letter and outline your reason for appeal.

Yours sincerely

Walsall council